United Nations ST/IC/2000/23

Secretariat

18 April 2000

Information circular*

To: Members of the staff at Headquarters

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: **Issuance of United States social security numbers to members of the United Nations diplomatic community**

1. The Secretary-General has received from the United States Mission to the United Nations a note verbale dated 8 March 2000 which provides information concerning the issuance of social security numbers to members of the United Nations diplomatic community and answers a number of questions asked by staff members serving at Headquarters.

2. A copy of the note verbale is set out in annex I to the present circular. Attached to the note verbale was the text of a Social Security Administration publication entitled "Lawfully Admitted Aliens — When You Need A Number and When You Don't", which is set out in annex II to the present circular.

* Expiration date of the present circular: 31 December 2001.

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Annex I

Note verbale dated 8 March 2000 from the United States Mission addressed to the Secretary-General

The United States Mission to the United Nations presents its compliments to the United Nations Secretariat and has the honour to bring to its attention the following information concerning the issuance of social security numbers to members of the United Nations diplomatic community.

The United States Mission wishes to inform the United Nations Secretariat that the United States Social Security Administration has advised the United States Mission that it does not assign social security numbers for identification purposes. Social security numbers are generally given only to United States citizens or lawfully admitted aliens who either have permission from the Immigration and Naturalization Service to work in the United States or receive benefits under a federal programme for which a social security number is required. Although state or local government agencies may choose to require a social security number for identification purposes, the Social Security Administration has advised that it does not assign social security numbers to aliens who are not otherwise eligible solely to meet the specific requirements of such agencies.

Because the Social Security Administration does not assign social security numbers for identification purposes, the United States Mission wishes to inform the United Nations Secretariat of benefits and services which may be obtained without a social security number. There are many situations where a social security number may be requested but is not required. Ambassadors, diplomatic agents and staff members of the Permanent Missions, and accredited representatives of organizations which are designated under the International Organizations Immunities Act, and their immediate families are not required to have social security numbers for banking or monetary transactions. They need only complete Internal Revenue Service (IRS) form W-8, Certificate of Foreign Status, available at banks or financial institutions.

Family members of foreign government officials do not need social security numbers to register for school. The United States Mission is informed that schools are not authorized to require a social security number for administering academic programmes and should assign internal numbers to students who are ineligible for social security numbers. Students may be asked to provide one, but an alternate form of identification should be acceptable. Social security numbers also are not necessary when reporting group health insurance coverage. Employees are not required to provide social security numbers for lawfully admitted non-immigrant alien family members who are covered by group health plans but do not have social security numbers.

Lawfully admitted non-immigrant aliens who claim themselves as dependants and do not have permission to work in the United States do not need a social security number for tax purposes. These individuals may obtain an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) by filling out IRS form W-7. An alien or spouse, not authorized to work, with income such as interest, investments or real estate must also apply for ITIN in order to file a tax return because a social security number will not be issued for this purpose. In addition, any lawfully admitted non-

immigrant alien may purchase savings bonds and may be designated a co-owner or beneficiary of such bonds without a social security number.

The United States Mission wishes to advise that in most states of the United States it no longer is necessary to have a social security number to secure a state-issued driver's licence or identification card. Under the Immigration Reform Act of 1996, a state-issued driver's licence or identification card must bear a social security number for a federal agency to use it to establish identity. However, this Act was not intended to prevent individuals who are legally in the United States from obtaining driver's licences or state identification cards. For this reason, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) adopted guidelines that provide states with a means to process the application of lawfully admitted aliens who do not have social security numbers. Such individuals must present documentation of their legal status in the United States, such as a passport, and are given a unique identifier as an alternative to a social security number.

Because there remain a relatively small number of states which require individuals to provide social security numbers to secure a driver's licence, the Social Security Administration will continue to assign social security numbers (for driver's licence purposes only) to any lawfully admitted alien who has met all other requirements for the licence. Any modifications to this procedure will be announced periodically on the Social Security Administration web site (http://www.ssa.gov). The new NHTSA guidelines should facilitate the issuance of driver's licences or state identification cards to eligible persons who previously were required to obtain social security numbers solely for that purpose. However, the United States Mission wishes to point out that persons who are required to secure driver's licences and register their motor vehicles through the State Department's Office of Foreign Missions still must do so and may not receive a driver's licence or register a motor vehicle locally.

The United States Mission trusts that this note and the enclosed information will clarify any misunderstanding surrounding the issuance of social security numbers for identification purposes.

Annex II

Social Security Administration

SSA Publication No. 05-10096
May 1999

Lawfully Admitted Aliens—When You Need A Number And When You Don't

When A Lawfully Admitted Alien Needs A Number

If you are a lawfully admitted alien with Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) permission to work in the U.S., you need a Social Security number. Also if you are a lawfully admitted alien who does not have permission to work, but wants to enlist in the U.S. military, federal law requires you to have a Social Security number. The number is used as your military service number.

You May Need A Number For Other Reasons

State and local laws that conform with federal law may require you to give a Social Security number—even if you don't have permission to work. The Social Security Act permits state and local governments to use the number to administer laws related to—

- taxes;
- general public assistance;
- driver licensing; or
- motor vehicle registration.

How Do You Get A Number?

If you have permission to work, bring your INS documents with you when you apply for your number. If you don't have permission to work, but still need a number, you must—

- call or visit one of our offices to apply for a number;
- provide original documents showing your age, identity and lawful alien status; and
- provide a letter, on letterhead stationery (no form letters or photocopies), from the government agency requiring you to get a number. The letter must specifically identify you as the applicant, cite the law requiring you to have a Social Security number and indicate that you meet all the agency's requirements, except having the number.

If you are assigned a number for nonwork purposes, you can't use it to work. If you use it to work, we may inform INS.

If You Need A Number For Tax Purposes—What Can You Do?

If you need a number for tax purposes, but don't meet Social Security's requirements to be assigned a number, you can apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

Visit IRS in person or by calling the toll-free IRS number **1-800-TAXFORM** (1-800-829-3676) and request form W-7, *Application for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number.*

What Can You Get Without A Number

As a lawfully admitted alien, you can obtain many benefits and services without having a number, even though you're asked to give one. You don't need a number to—

- **purchase savings bonds.** A lawfully admitted alien may be designated a co-owner or beneficiary without a number.
- **conduct business with a financial institution.** For tax purposes, financial institutions will ask you for a taxpayer identification number. If you aren't eligible for a Social Security number, contact IRS. IRS can help you determine if you need an ITIN.
- **register for school or apply for educational tests.** Schools aren't authorized to use the number to administer education programs. A student applying for the SAT, GRE and other educational tests doesn't need a Social Security number to take the test.

- **report group health insurance coverage.** Employers aren't required to report Social Security numbers for lawfully admitted alien family members who are covered by group health plans but don't have numbers.
- **apply for school lunch programs**. The parent applying for free or reduced-price lunch for the child(ren) can use his/her own number or should get a letter from Social Security stating no number will be assigned.
- **apply for HUD housing.** Family members age 6 and older must give a Social Security number or get a letter from us stating no number can be assigned.

For More Information

You can get more information 24 hours a day by calling our toll-free number, **1-800-772-1213**. You can call for an appointment or speak to a service representative between the hours of 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on business days. Our lines are busiest early in the week and early in the month, so, if your business can wait, it's best to call at other times.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing may call our toll-free "TTY" number, 1-800-325-0778, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on business days.

Social Security information is now available on the Internet at www.ssa.gov.

We treat all calls confidentially—whether they're made to our toll-free numbers or to one of our local offices. We also want to make sure that you receive accurate and courteous service. That's why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some incoming and outgoing telephone calls.